

SERVICE AVIATION



*Royal Air Force
and Official
Announcements :
Fleet Air Arm
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Aviation Abroad*



THE HURRYCANE : The production-model Hawker Hurricane of the type which made the fine flight recorded below.

Turnhouse—Northolt in 48 Minutes

Sqn. Ldr. J. W. GILLAN, O.C. No. 111 (Fighter) Squadron, flew from Turnhouse, near Edinburgh, to Northolt in 48 minutes last Thursday, February 10. The distance of 327 miles was thus covered at a speed of 408.75 m.p.h. His machine was a Hawker Hurricane (Merlin engine) and it carried full military equipment and a normal load of fuel.

The flight was made in darkness, for Sqn. Ldr. Gillan took off at 17.5 hours and landed at 17.53 hours. He obviously made full use of the new Service blind-flying panel with which the Hurricane was equipped; the instruments grouped are a gyro-horizon and directional gyro (Sperry), rate-of-climb and air-speed indicators (Smith's), turn-and-bank indicator (Reid and Sigrist), and Kollsman-K.B.B. sensitive altimeter.

Most of the flight was made, without oxygen, at 17,000ft., an altitude which might affect an untrained person, but which should not—and in the present case did not—cause discomfort to a fit Service pilot.

Sqn. Ldr. Gillan flew on a bearing of 167 deg. true, while the following wind, which was blowing at a strength of at least 50 m.p.h., was on a bearing of 310 deg. true. The engine was not run at full throttle. During the flight the windscreen became coated with frost, and the pilot could not see landmarks until he reached Bedford, when he began to glide down. He landed with the aid of one landing light and a set of flares.

A flight of three Hurricanes of No. 111 (F.) Squadron recently made the same flight in an hour.

Strife in the West Country

TO cater for the demands of Expansion the Air Ministry is seeking sites for about half a dozen more inland bombing ranges. These are required within reasonable distance of certain areas to provide practice for groups of neighbouring squadrons, and it is proving far from easy not only to discover suitable sites, but to reconcile local authorities and residents to the scheme.

There is a prevalent, though totally erroneous, idea that the establishment of such ranges means processions of noisy aeroplanes dropping devastating bombs at considerable danger and inconvenience to local residents and farmers. The facts are as follows :

The belief that live bombs are used is entirely fallacious, there being special areas out at sea for full-scale practice. The bombs dropped on inland ranges are small 8½-lb. canisters filled with stannic chloride which is released by a detonator,

the resulting puff of white smoke permitting accurate spotting. Bombing is not normally done on such ranges from an altitude below 6,000 feet, the smaller danger area offered by an aerodrome being adequate for practice from lower altitudes. Dive-bombing practice, too, is normally done over an aerodrome.

The site for an inland range should be a flat or concave piece of ground (so that observers may ensure that the range is clear of trespassers during practice) 2,000 yards in diameter.

In recent months the Air Ministry has been examining areas of land in Dorset with a view to providing a range for a group of neighbouring squadrons. Five sites were examined but did not satisfy all requirements, and when a sixth site—at Crichel—was considered and found to be technically suitable, local objection was raised and an alternative situation near Blandford was suggested. Blandford residents and authorities manifested similar displeasure and after several weeks of meditation the Air Ministry decided to hold a demonstration of practice bombing at Porton Ranges, near Boscombe Down, to "illustrate how little practice bombing would affect the amenities of either locality and to facilitate an agreed settlement."

Representatives of Lord Alington, the Blandford Town Council, East Dorset Joint Planning Committee and the residents of Crichel accordingly foregathered on the windswept Porton range to witness a Hind drop eight bombs. The pilot was forced by cloud to fly abnormally low—little more than 1,000ft.—which did not permit the fullest advantage to be taken of the course-setting bomb sight and this fact, added to the force of the wind, accounted for the first bomb falling about 400 yards from the target. Subsequent projectiles fell some yards nearer. The assembly seemed to take a poor view of the margin of error (though the safety area guaranteed them is more than ample) ; they regarded the drifting smoke with disfavour ; they were cold ; the demonstration was not very exciting ; and altogether the occasion was not a happy one.

One welcomed the visit to Porton, however, because it afforded an opportunity to examine the workings of a typical bombing range. Briefly, there are quadrant sights at two positions, each of which takes a bearing on the "explosion" enabling the accuracy of the bombing to be calculated to within close limits. The main quadrant hut is in telephonic communication with the second sighting position, the operator of the quadrant recording his own readings and those 'phoned to him. Extending from this main hut are electric cables for lighting the target with a ring of lights for night bombing. By day the target is a ring of chalk fifty yards across.

Station Administration

THE R.A.F. Station, Boscombe Down, will be transferred from No. 4 (Bomber) Group to No. 1 (Bomber) Group, with effect from April 20.

The R.A.F. Station, Worthy Down, will be transferred from the Bomber Command to the Coastal Command and placed in No. 17 (Training) Group, with effect from April 20.

British Legion and the Balloon Barrage

SURREY branches of the British Legion have unanimously agreed to assist in raising a balloon barrage squadron of the Auxiliary Air Force. The squadron will form part of the scheme for the defence of London, and will consist of one officer and 66 N.C.O.s and airmen of the Royal Air Force and 11 officers and 527 N.C.O.s and airmen of the Auxiliary Air Force.